5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
O117 Murngin O117

Everyday Life

262 511 Being a purely nomadic people, the greater part of the time of these aborigines is devoted to the procuring of food. The coastal districts of Arnhem Land are much better supplied than the arid areas of the inland, but even there a serious shortage of food is by no means infrequent. Almost all living creatures are eaten, as well as a large variety of roots and berries, but there is ever the daily uncertainty concerning the supplying of the body's needs.

461 517 When not engaged in hunting, the men spend many hours fashioning their weapons and utensils, in which work they display a marked degree of skill and ability. The preparations for, and the actual performance of, ceremonials occupy much time and energy, and in these their love of decorative and dramatic art finds truly remarkable expression.

462 The women are the real burden-bearers. When the camping ground is reached, it is the women who have to prepare the camp and obtain the necessary wood and water. Every day they engage in the search for food, such as the smaller animals, roots, berries, and shell fish. No matter how successful the men have been in their pursuit of larger game, the women must not fail in their daily contribution to the needs of the family. To them also falls the care of the younger children, and the construction of most of the utensils for ordinary use.

854 Great affection is shown by both parents for their children, who are rarely corrected, and whose every whim is responded to. [142 145] When an aboriginal baby is born it is of a light yellowish colour, but during the course of a week or so darkens to the normal [302] chocolate-brown of the race. For the purpose of ensuring this deepening of colour, the infant, when two or three days old, is rubbed all over with a mixture of ashes and powdered charcoal. [856] Immediately after birth the nose is flattened and the nostrils distended by finger pressure. The form of the skull is also moulded by the mid-wife's hands.

853 145 Babies are nursed by their mothers until they are up to four years of age, and during that period are extremely plump and soft-fleshed. After weaning, however, they quickly develop into the spindly-limbed form characteristic of the children of many PRIMITIVE RACES.